

7.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

7.1 REPORT CIRCULATION, PUBLIC MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

To announce the start of the feasibility phase, a Public Notice was issued to residents, federal, state and local agencies and interest groups. The recipients were invited to provide input into the feasibility-level study, including the scoping of the environmental issues that should be addressed throughout the study. The notice announced two public meetings, held by the Corps and the State Coastal Conservancy, which also served as SEIS/R scoping meetings. The meetings were conducted on September 25, 2001 and December 5, 2001.

The Draft General Reevaluation Report was released on July 19, 2002. A 45-day public review and comment period follows the release to solicit comments from the public, regulatory agencies, local interests and other stakeholders. On August 21, 2002, a public meeting was held to solicit any additional comments. Due to difficulties in accessing the document from at least one public repository, the public review period was extended by 10 days to September 13, 2002.

7.2 GENERAL REEVALUATION STUDY INVOLVEMENT

7.2.1 Institutional Involvement

During the feasibility-level study for the GRR, coordination with the FWS was conducted in accordance with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act. The FWS has expressed support for the project; a letter dated May 16, 2002 and a letter dated September 30, 2002 are attached as Appendix H. The FWS provided the Corps with a Draft Coordination Act Report (DCAR) in February 2003. This document is currently in review. The FWS will coordinate the DCAR with the NMFS and the California DFG.

7.2.2 Study Team

During the feasibility-level study for the GRR, staff from the SCC and BCDC participated in the study's technical team and contributed directly in the study effort. As a result of this involvement, the SCC and BCDC have expressed their interest in their participation as study team members during the Pre-construction, Engineering and Design phase.

7.2.3 Hamilton Restoration Group

The Hamilton Restoration Group (HRG), a forum for a variety of interests to provide input on project feasibility, goals, design, and other relevant issues, was established by the National Marine Fisheries Service in the summer of 1995. The lead was handed to the Coastal Conservancy in 1996. Participants in the HRG include the Coastal Conservancy, BCDC, City of Novato, California Regional Water Quality Control Board,

California Department of Fish and Game, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Port of Oakland, University of California, environmental groups, interested public, and congressional representatives.

7.2.4 Coastal America Partnership

This project is also part of the Coastal America Program. In 1992, the Coastal America Partnership was created to more effectively address critical coastal environmental problems facing our nation. It leverages the resources, expertise, and authorities of the federal natural resource, infrastructure, and military agencies with state, local, tribal, and non-governmental organizations. Federal agencies coalesced to form this partnership focused on habitat restoration, sediment contamination remediation, and non-point source pollution prevention within coastal areas. A national implementation team was established along with eight regional implementation teams. Member agencies include: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Army, Department of Energy, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Department of Agriculture. Over 250 projects are either underway or completed.

In April 1995, the National Marine Fisheries Service recommended to the Southwest Implementation Team for Coastal America that the base closure at the Hamilton Army Airfield and the potential for nearly 700 acres of wetland restoration be endorsed as a "Coastal America" project. The wetland restoration proposal was based on wetland reuse as recommended by the Hamilton Reuse Planning Authority and adopted by the City of Novato. The Coastal America partnership served as a catalyst in linking Federal, state, regional, and local interests in the base closure, wetland restoration, and dredged material placement from navigation projects in the San Francisco Bay area.

7.2.5 Public and Agency Involvement

Input from members of the public, organizations with an interest in the project, and local, state and federal agency staff was an essential component of the planning process for this Hamilton Wetland Restoration GRR to incorporate BMK. Tools used to introduce members of the public and interested agencies and organizations to the project and to solicit input included: interviews with stakeholders and technical consultants; Technical Information Committee (TIC) meetings; and public meetings. North Marin Water District participated as a stakeholder in the HWRP group meetings.

7.2.5.1 Stakeholder Interviews

In late August and early September 2001, a series of interviews was conducted with staff of local, state, and federal agencies, and technical consultants who were previously involved with the Hamilton wetland restoration project or had knowledge or experience relevant to the BMKV project site. The interviews covered a range of topics that were

organized into 4 general categories: (1) general restoration planning goals and objectives; (2) site-specific questions; (3) site-specific restoration planning issues; and (4) the public participation process. An Issue Audit Memorandum summarizing the results of the interviews was prepared to guide the initial phase of the planning process (Appendix B of Bel Marin Keys Conceptual Restoration Design Technical Report, attached).

7.2.5.2 Technical Information Committee Meetings

As a follow-up to the interview process, two meetings of the Technical Information Committee (TIC) were held with the interview participants and other interested individuals, in order to further clarify planning issues and solicit input on alternative restoration concepts. The TIC meetings were held on October 2, 2001 and November 6, 2001. Key planning issues identified by the TIC at the October 2 meeting included the following:

- Flood protection for adjacent properties;
- Sediment deposition in Novato Creek;
- Diversity of target restoration habitats and the need to achieve appropriate post-restoration habitat mix;
- Integration with Pacheco Pond, Arroyo San Jose, and Pacheco Creek;
- Marin County flood protection easements and covenants;
- Vector control;
- Integration with adjacent Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project; and
- Long-term management requirements.

The November 6th TIC meeting focused on reviewing a series of alternative restoration concepts developed for the project site. Key issues associated with the alternatives discussed at the meeting included the following:

- The reasonable range of alternatives (e.g., inclusion of an alternative that does not rely on placement of dredged material as fill);
- Alternative alignments for the Novato Sanitary District outfall line;
- Alternative Bay Trail alignments;
- Flood protection concerns;
- Potential impacts on existing habitats;
- Historic conditions; and
- Habitat mix and viability, including the source of water for seasonal wetlands.

7.2.5.3 Public Meetings

During the restoration planning process, the project team held three public meetings to introduce interested members of the public to the project and to solicit public input. These meetings were held on September 25, 2001, December 5, 2001, and August 21, 2002. The initial public meeting provided the public with an opportunity to meet the project sponsors, to review and discuss the project goals and objectives, and to provide input on site-related opportunities and constraints. The second public meeting provided a forum for discussion of alternative restoration concepts and potential environmental issues, and served as a formal scoping meeting for the environmental compliance process. Public comments received at these meetings were recorded for consideration during the restoration planning process. In addition, participants at the second public meeting were encouraged to submit written comments to the project sponsors during the 30-day public comment period. Issues of concern identified through the public scoping process included:

- flood protection,
- public access to the project area,
- potential impacts on Novato Creek, and
- impacts on existing biological resources.

Appendix D and Appendix F, presented as part of the Technical Appendices attached to this General Reevaluation Report, contain a more detailed summary of issues identified during the public scoping process.

The third public meeting provided a forum for discussion of the preliminary alternatives and served as a formal meeting for the environmental compliance process. Participants were encouraged to submit written comments during the 45-day public review period. Additional issues of concern identified during this period were: include:

- navigation in Novato Creek,
- flood insurance,
- scenic views from adjacent residences,
- traffic, and
- public health (particularly mosquito breeding habitat).

With the exception of flood insurance, all of these key additional issues were discussed in the draft SEIR/EIS. Discussion of flood insurance has been added to the final SEIR/EIS.

Formal responses to comments are presented in a separate volume, *Responses to Comments, Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement Bel Marin Keys Unit V Expansion of the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project*, California State Coastal Conservancy and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, November 2002.